

Testimony of
U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback
on
The CARFA Act (S.1668)

**Trimming the Fat: Examining Duplicative
and Outdated Federal Programs and Functions**

**10:00 a.m., Thursday
May 6, 2004
342 Dirksen Senate Office Building**

**U.S. Senate Committee on Government Affairs
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management,
the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia**

I would like to thank chairman Voinovich for holding this important hearing on the Commission on the Accountability and Review of Federal Agencies (CARFA) Act (S.1668).

The Problem

Mr. Chairman, federal waste is a grave disservice to hardworking taxpayers across our great nation, and yet our governmental bureaucracies are riddled with it—whether through unnecessary duplicative, inefficient, outdated or failed agencies and programs.

I am afraid that the Congress is not nearly as scrupulous as it ought to be when it comes to spending hardworking taxpayer dollars.

Every year, the Congress legislates various programs into existence. Whether individual members agree or disagree with the substance of these programs is one issue, but I think most of us would concede that most of these programs are well-intended.

The trouble is that once a program comes into existence, experience tells us that the program is here to stay—whether it is successful, unsuccessful, or outdated.

This problem is epidemic, and the evidence abounds that programs simply ‘do not go gentle into the good night.’

Indeed, as President Reagan noted, “There is nothing more permanent than a ‘temporary’ government program.”

PART

Mr. Chairman, the examples of government programs that have failed to address effectively the problem they targeted abound.

Of course, we all remember the \$600 toilet seat, but the problem is much bigger. To illustrate this point, I have a chart showing some scores by Department from the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) FY04 and FY05 Performance Assessment Rating Tool (PART).

I am glad that Clay Johnson, Deputy Director of OMB will be testifying today. I know that he and the current administration are results-oriented, and I look forward to his comments on the CARFA Act, and what we have learned through the PART process.

The chart that I have shows what PART turned-up in its first 2 rounds. As we look at the PART scores, I have put what would be the corresponding academic grades by each average score.

Keep in mind that not all agencies have been reviewed by PART thus far, nor have all programs within those agencies, but I think we see a trend.

The Median Score on this chart indicates the percentage of programs within each agency meeting their goals.

If these scores were children's grades on a report card, there would be some cause for concern. Just looking at departments with five or more programs reviewed, there are no A's and no B's. Transportation, which had 10 programs reviewed, scored a C+. There were only four scores that would rank within the C range. There were nine D's. There were eight F's. Education—of all departments—had 33 programs reviewed and only scored a 44.0-percent.

Are taxpayers really getting their money's worth?

The Congress needs to take concrete steps to ensure that hard-earned taxpayer dollars are being efficiently used by the federal government.

From personal experience I can tell you that few things are more upsetting to my Kansas constituents than to see wasteful federal spending.

Kansans often say to me: "I do not mind paying my taxes, but it is infuriating to see my hard-earned money being poorly spent by the federal government. If I am going to work hard to earn this money, I want it spent wisely."

These are real concerns that need to be addressed.

CARFA: A Solution

So, how do we address the problem of eliminating well-intended, though ineffective or outdated government programs?

First, we must learn from both our past failures and successes.

What can largely be characterized as a failure would be our valiant efforts to take on entire agencies head-on. We have learned that once a program—and especially an entire departmental agency—is in place, you cannot tear it out at the root.

The best that you can do is to starve such an establishment by decreasing funds one-year-at-a-time. Still, this approach has largely been ineffective.

There are too many special interests and too many influences that will prevent us from taking the ax to the root of established agencies and programs—even after they have failed or become obsolete.

However, I believe we have had one process that has been successful in the realm of program-elimination and prioritization of spending—the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC).

A History of BRAC

BRAC originated in the 1960's under President Kennedy as the Department of Defense (DOD) had to realign its base structure after World War II and the Korean War. At that time the DOD was able to close bases without Congressional interference, and sixty bases were closed in the 1960's.

Naturally Congress was upset with the political and economic ramifications back home, but their efforts to kill BRAC failed until 1977 when President Carter signed legislation allowing the Congress to micro-manage base closings. As a result no major military bases were closed in the 1980's.

In the late 1980's, under Congressman Dick Armey's leadership, BRAC was revived in its present form, with the BRAC commission submitting its recommendations to Congress for the realignment and closure of military bases, with the Congress taking an up-or-down vote to accept or reject the plan as a whole.

The CARFA Act

BRAC has been our one successful model for eliminating wasteful federal spending—in this case military bases—and with this in mind, I specifically modeled the Commission on the Accountability and Review of Federal Agencies (CARFA) Act (S.1668) after BRAC.

Whereas the BRAC Commission examined military bases and the Department of Defense (DOD), CARFA would review federal agencies, and programs within agencies. The scope of this commission would be directed toward non-DOD discretionary agencies and programs.

In only reviewing non-DOD discretionary spending, CARFA would review, roughly, a modest quarter of federal spending. I see this as a reasonable first step. If CARFA is successful, future Congresses may choose to authorize new rounds, as there have been multiple rounds of BRAC.

The Details of CARFA

CARFA is designed for success using a narrow set of criteria, which should produce significant results. The three areas of review are:

Duplicative – Where two or more agencies or programs are performing the same essential function and the function can be consolidated or streamlined into a single agency or program, the commission would recommend that the agency or program be realigned.

Wasteful or Inefficient – Where the commission finds an agency or program to have wasted federal funds by egregious spending; mismanagement of resources or personnel; or use of federal funds for personal benefit or for the benefit of a special interest group, it would recommend that such agency or program be realigned or eliminated.

Outdated, Irrelevant, or Failed – Where the commission finds that an agency or program has completed its intended purpose; become irrelevant; or failed to meet its objectives, it would recommend the elimination of such agency or program.

I have a flow chart to help explain the process after the commission completes its review.

After completing its evaluation, the commission would submit to Congress both a plan with recommendations of the agencies and programs that should be realigned or eliminated, and proposed legislation to implement this plan.

As with the successful BRAC model, the Congress would consider this legislation on an expedited basis with a comment period from the committees of jurisdiction. Within the expedited time-frame, the Congress would take an up-or-down vote on the legislation as a whole without amendment.

If CARFA's recommendations are enacted, significant savings would likely result.

If CARFA's recommendations are rejected, Congressional authorizers would have a useful guide, which would bring together into a single source measures such as the Government Performance Results Act (GPRA); the Inspector General (IG) Reports; OMB's Performance Assessment Rating Tool (PART); as well as CARFA's own findings of fact.

Answers to Concerns

Some have raised concerns that CARFA would amount to the Congress delegating its authority. I answer this concern by noting that CARFA is an appropriate exercise of Congressional oversight and authority. Nothing substantive happens unless the Congress passes the Commission's proposed legislation.

Others have concerns over the expedited process for CARFA, because amendments at either the committee level or on the Floor are not in order. I answer this concern by noting that the only chance we have for successfully eliminating government waste through CARFA is a straight up-or-down vote. BRAC was successful because members had to vote on the whole package.

In the case of BRAC, if members could offer amendments to exempt specific bases, BRAC would not be successful. In the case of CARFA, if members could offer amendments to exempt specific programs or agencies, CARFA will not be successful.

The expedited procedure in this bill is its key to success. With the expedited process in CARFA, we have the chance to truly reduce government waste. Without the expedited process, it is doubtful that the commission's effort would result in waste elimination.

Prioritizing spending, and maximizing the effectiveness of taxpayer dollars is absolutely essential. The CARFA process is the vehicle that will give us the chance to say 'no' to well-intentioned programs are now wasteful or have failed.

Intended Results of CARFA

CARFA is about maximizing the benefit of all federal funds. Significant savings could result from CARFA, which could be directed toward higher Congressional priorities, such as paying down the national debt.

It is my hope that enactment of CARFA would provide a real tool at the service of the federal government, in order that we can better prioritize spending, and shift funds from less beneficial to more beneficial areas.

I believe that Americans would greatly benefit from such a commission, which has the real potential to help us truly root out inefficiency in the federal government in such a way that we can more fully realize the benefit of all federal funds. That is the spirit of the CARFA Act.

Summary

The use of hard-earned taxpayer dollars on duplicative, inefficient, and failed Federal agencies and programs is a serious problem facing our nation today. Over and over, we see congressionally authorized programs become institutionalized; and then—though no longer necessary—they become permanent fixtures receiving more taxpayer dollars year after year.

The Commission on the Accountability and Review of Federal Agencies (CARFA) Act (S.1668), would change this.

The CARFA Act is the antidote to the Congress' general unwillingness to end politicians' pet-projects.

I thank the Chairman for this opportunity to testify in favor of the CARFA Act.